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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002968

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: JORDANIANS PROTEST REPORTS OF ISRAELI EXTREMIST
PLANS IN JERUSALEM

REF: AMMAN 2426

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Reports that Israeli extremists intended to enter the Haram al-Sharif over the weekend prompted public warnings from King Abdullah that such a move would spark wider unrest in the region. GOJ officials say they are in close contact with Israeli counterparts to avoid re-kindling yet another cycle of violence. Meanwhile, Jordanian students (organized by the Islamic Action Front) protested at several university campuses and refugee camps on April 10. The rallies -- the second at the University of Jordan in less than a month -- ended without incident. End Summary.

KING WARNS EXTREMISTS COULD WREAK HAVOC

2. (U) In response to reports that Israeli settlers intended to enter the Islamic holy sites inside the old city of Jerusalem, King Abdullah on April 10 issued a public warning that such a move would destabilize the region. "Any ...tampering with this sacred Arab and Muslim site will destroy security and stability in the region," the king told Jordan's official news agency, Petra. His comments were featured prominently in local newspapers. The King called on the Israeli government to prevent the Jewish extremists from approaching al-Aqsa Mosque, which is under the custodianship of Jordan. He stressed that Jordan will continue contacts with the Israeli government to avoid any incident, noting that Jordan's peace treaty with Israel provides for Jordan's special role in preserving the holy sites in Jerusalem.

3. (U) The King's comments followed remarks by an unnamed foreign ministry official published in papers on April 9 that Jordan was exerting all diplomatic efforts to stave off a crisis. "The government, in line with its duties stipulated in the 1994 peace treaty with Israel, is currently trying through diplomatic means to prevent any harm to the holy sites of Jerusalem," the official said. Meanwhile, during a meeting in Amman with his Palestinian counterpart Ahmad Qure'ia on April 9, newly-appointed Prime Minister Adnan Badran reiterated Jordan's support for the Palestinians in establishing an independent state.

IAF ORGANIZES ANTI-ISRAEL PROTESTS

4. (U) The Muslim Brotherhood's political arm, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), organized rallies to protest the actions of Israeli extremists at several university campuses and refugee camps throughout Jordan on April 10. Demonstrators called for a severing of diplomatic relations with Israel, expelling Israel's ambassador to Jordan, and allowing HAMAS officials to return to Jordan. (Note: Then-GOJ spokesperson Asma Khader told reporters at a recent press conference, in response to a journalist's question, that the GOJ is not considering allowing the return of HAMAS. End note.)

5. (SBU) The largest rally took place on the campus of the University of Jordan in Amman, when approximately 1,000 students gathered at noon. Jordan University witnessed a similar rally -- albeit not as large -- on March 22 to mark the anniversary of HAMAS founder Sheikh Yasin's death (ref). RSO contacts, who had monitored the rally, reported that it was tightly contained by Public Security Directorate (PSD) officers. A front-page Reuters photo carried by the English-language Jordan Times showed PSD officers dressed in riot gear facing the demonstrators, who included male and female protesters. The students shouted anti-Israeli and anti-U.S. slogans and burned the Israeli flag, according to RSO contacts. The march ended peacefully after an hour.

6. (SBU) Meanwhile, two hundreds students rallied at the Applied Science University in Amman, and approximately 60 students gathered at al-Baq'a refugee camp north of the capital. No violence or arrests were reported during the demonstrations, according to the PSD. Local papers also reported demonstrations at Mu'tah University in the southern

town of Karak as well as Zarqa National University. Police contacts confirmed that the governor of Irbid refused permission for a march that was intended to begin after Friday prayers on April 8 outside the main mosque in downtown Irbid.

COMMENT

17. (C) Jordanian authorities view student demonstrations, carefully monitored by security services, as a relatively safe outlet of expression for the widespread frustration Jordanians feel on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. In the aftermath of the GOJ's controversial crackdown on (anti-U.S., anti-Israel) political activity by the professional associations in recent months, and sensitive to international criticism of its hard-line approach to public gatherings, the GOJ may have decided to take a more measured -- albeit controlled -- approach to this week's rallies. Jordanian authorities tell us that permits are not required for demonstrations held on university campuses, as long as they stay within the university's confines. We expect that if there is an attempt to move rallies beyond the campuses, they will be blocked.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

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